

Conserving Aviation Heritage Resources in the U.S. Air Force

The U.S. Air Force is a study in dynamism, enforcing the Nation's defense aims through about 400% more deployments and with some 40% fewer personnel than at the height of the Cold War. Today, the Air Force maintains about 70 active bases throughout the U.S., comprising some 9,000,000 acres. The average size of a base is about 5,000 to 10,000 acres, although a few large ranges and test facilities in the western U.S. have more than a million acres. Think of a typical installation as a medium-sized town or community, with a similar population size and infrastructure. Preserving sensitive historical resources on or over lands owned or controlled by the Air Force is a challenge, involving warfighting operational commanders, land managers and engineers, preservation experts, regulatory agencies, tribal, state and local governments, and the public.

Air Force Missions, Policies and Organization

Air Force policy is to follow the spirit and letter of federal, state, and local laws regarding historic preservation and cultural resource management. The primary requirements are summarized in *Department of Defense (DoD) Instruction 4715.3, Environmental Conservation*, and *DoD Directive 4710.1, Archeological and Historic Resources Management*. The key documents for the Air Force are *Policy Directive 32-70, Environmental Quality*, and *Instruction 32-7065, Cultural Resources Management*.

At the Pentagon, HQ Air Force develops policy and advocates for funds before Congress. Below this level, major commands (MAJCOMs) direct key functional parts of the department. There are three large land-managing commands, focused on warfighting (Air Combat Command or ACC), weapons development, testing, and production or acquisition (Air Force Materiel Command or AFMC), and education and training (Air Education and Training Command or AETC). These and the other major commands

are typically led by a four-star general, the military's highest rank and in many respects a role comparable to the chief executive officer of a major corporation in its scope and complexity. The MAJCOMs are composed of a headquarters and individual bases, and they have staffs that incorporate the general policy of the Pentagon level with their particular missions and funding profiles. Day-to-day guidance comes from cultural resource professionals at the command staffs in the headquarters, the Air Force Center for Environmental Excellence (Brooks Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas) or at the few bases with such personnel.

Within the Air Force's civil engineering community, environmental organizations have grown up since the 1970s to address legal requirements, including those dealing with cultural resources. Cultural resources management duties were typically aligned with natural resources (forestry, wildlife biology, and management) and environmental impact analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Over the past decade professional archeologists, most with advanced degrees, have been added to the environmental staffs at larger bases and ranges and at some of the major command headquarters. These individuals identify the work to be done and the funding required. In the 1988–91 period, the Air Force developed a comprehensive system to identify environmental projects required to comply with federal and state laws and regulations. Archeological studies were part of this system. Base cultural resource managers fold the archeological and other cultural resource requirements into their environmental budget and forward it to the command headquarters for validation. The service headquarters at the Pentagon disburses funds each fall to the commands based on these budgets, although the final word on funding distribution is at the discretion of the MAJCOM commander.

Until the early 1990s, Air Force cultural resources surveys were undertaken mainly as part

*Hangar 9 (1918),
Brooks AFB,
San Antonio,
Texas. Courtesy
U.S. Air Force.*

of environmental impact statements prepared to comply with NEPA, or to comply with inventory needs of the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). Since then, however, funds were made available to begin inventories in compliance with Section 110 of NHPA. During this same period Congress created the DoD Legacy Resource Management Program, through the DoD Appropriations Act of 1991, P.L. 101-511, Sec. 8120(a). The Legacy mandate emphasizes inventory and protection of sensitive natural and cultural resources and increasing public awareness of DoD resource stewardship. With more than \$70,000,000 spent in the Legacy Program since fiscal year 1991, bases in partnership with federal and non-federal agencies, academic institutions, and other groups performed hundreds of projects.

The Recent Past: Historic Buildings and Structures

The Air Force by nature is a creature of the Cold War, established in 1947 from the old Army Air Forces. Most of its thousands of buildings and structures date from the Cold War era (1946–1989) and are less than 50 years old. In addition, the number of bases today is far smaller than a generation ago, due to successive downsizing at the end of World War II and the Cold War. In 1943, at the height of World War II, the Army Air Forces had 345 main bases, 116 sub-bases, and 322 auxiliary airfields. When Strategic Air Command (SAC) and Tactical Air Command (TAC) were disestablished in 1992 and Air Combat Command created in their place, it comprised more than 40 major bases and ranges. Today ACC includes 17 bases.

There are a few bases whose roots extend back into Army days as either Western frontier garrison posts or early centers of military aviation. For example, Offutt AFB, the former home of SAC near Omaha, Nebraska, contains the 1890s Fort Crook Historic District from its Army days. Francis Warren AFB in Cheyenne, Wyoming, contains the 19th-century Fort David A. Russell National Historic Landmark District. Kelly AFB in San Antonio, Texas, and Langley AFB in Hampton, Virginia, date to World War I



and contain National Register eligible or listed properties. In 1976, Hangar 9 (1918) at Brooks AFB became a national historic landmark as the only surviving hangar built by the U.S. Army Signal Corps Aviation Section, and the oldest Air Force aircraft storage and repair facility. These were some of the first installations to incorporate building types and planning schemes tailored to the aviation mission.

In the early 1920s, lack of military appropriations led to deplorable conditions at Army Air Service stations because they only had temporary buildings from the first world war. The Air Corps Act of 1926 authorized an expansion program to strengthen the air arm. It produced permanent construction at almost all of the 32 stations and depots retained after the war, as well as two new airfields with innovative layouts, Barksdale Field (now AFB) in Shreveport, Louisiana, and Randolph Field in San Antonio, Texas. The Army Quartermaster Corps designed substantial buildings for the Air Corps in a variety of historic architectural styles, including the Spanish Colonial Revival and “French Provincial.” Both Barksdale and Randolph AFBs have historic districts listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

These pre-World War II buildings, structures, and districts have all the maintenance and repair problems and challenges familiar to readers of *CRM*. Particularly acute is the DoD perception that older historic quarters are excessively expensive to maintain. General officer quarters are often singled out by Congress for special scrutiny. The Air Force has an enviable track record in staying within statutory limitations on per quarters spending for maintenance and repair

while preserving the attractive appearance and historic qualities of these properties. However, beneath the surface of these decades-old buildings looms the need for major overhaul of their building systems. The Air Force, the Administration, and Congress must weigh budget factors, mission importance, and historic preservation when considering the destiny of these attractive quarters.

The National Register Process

Air Force policy on the National Register process fluctuated through the 1990s in response to political and budget pressures in Washington. In the early part of the decade, results of cultural resource inventories were just coming in and bases forwarded several nominations to the Pentagon for approval. Some of the properties listed during this period include historic districts at Barksdale AFB in Louisiana and Pope AFB in North Carolina, and the Titan Missile Complex near Davis-Monthan AFB, Tucson, Arizona. In 1994, the new AFInstruction 32-7065 required bases to forward nominations within 24 months of a determination of eligibility, a move intended to bring closure to the growing number of “eligible” properties being identified by contract inventories.

However, over the next two years the Air Force, the Texas State Historic Preservation Officer, and the Keeper of the National Register consulted at length over the proposed nomina-

tion for the Randolph Field Historic District at Randolph AFB in San Antonio. Air Force senior leadership was and remains concerned over the number of historic buildings in large historic districts, all requiring adherence to the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for Rehabilitation* (part of the Secretary of the Interior's *Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*). Consequently, HQ Air Force declared a temporary moratorium on processing Register nominations until a new policy could be developed, one that reflected a commitment to stewardship and support for maintaining a high state of readiness within budget limitations. The Air Force recommitted itself to the preservation and management of historic properties in a September 1995 joint proclamation signed by the Vice Chief of Staff, the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force (Manpower, Reserve Affairs, Installations, and Environment), other senior Air Force leaders, the Chairman of the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the President of the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers, the President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places.

New policy on National Register nominations was issued on November 21, 1996. Among other things, this policy rescinded the AFInstruction requirement for nominations

*Randolph Field,
San Antonio,
Texas, c. 1935.
Courtesy San
Antonio Card
Co., San
Antonio, Texas.*



within 24 months of eligibility determination. It did, however, remove the moratorium and accept new nominations for listing. Historic districts, multiple property, and national historic landmark nominations are now required to pass through a more rigorous review at the command and Pentagon levels, focusing on potential impacts to maintenance budgets and project uses of the property.

History, Museums, and Aircraft

"History" has a unique meaning in the U.S. Air Force, i.e., the history of the service, its units, missions, leaders, and men and women memorable for their particular achievements. This history is the purview of the Office of Air Force History, which employs a small cadre of professional historians to write and maintain unit histories. Civilian and military historians also serve at the command and base levels, typically reporting to the commander or the director of staff. At base level, wing historians are typically non-commissioned officers or junior level commissioned officers and have little knowledge of base history apart from its connection with the operational units they chronicle. Conversely, cultural resource managers and others in the civil engineering organization, charged with managing real property assets, often have little awareness of the missions of the units that occupied the buildings and structures.

Within the last few years, the Office of Air Force History has also assumed direction of the Air Force Museum and its holdings, both at the main facility at Wright-Patterson AFB, Dayton, Ohio, and at bases throughout the department. Unlike the Army, the Air Force does not maintain local or regional museums at installations around the country. The Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson AFB is the world class institution which preserves unique historical or representative specimens of the Army Air Corps and U.S. Air Force aviation heritage. Visitors to Air Force bases or to neighboring communities may see Air Force aircraft on static display. Most of these aircraft were acquired by base or private groups on loan from the Air Force Museum, which maintains accountability for them through the history offices at the relevant major commands. Bases may also have collections of aviation memorabilia on display or in storage.

Accountability of these collections is also maintained through the Office of Air Force History and major command history offices.

Under National Register guidelines, intact aircraft are classified as structures for purposes of listing. Few U.S. Air Force aircraft are listed in the National Register of Historic Places to date, and it is the exception rather than the rule that base static displays of aircraft contain noteworthy historical specimens. Most of the latter are maintained at the Air Force Museum. At least within Air Combat Command, any potential nominations of aircraft for National Register eligibility would be coordinated through the Air Force Museum, reflecting their special cognizance in this area. Wrecks of Air Force aircraft occur on or near military installations throughout the nation. These are particularly numerous around World War II training bases and ranges. Pre-1961 aircraft wrecks on non-Air Force property are considered abandoned by the Air Force, largely due to a Pentagon fire at that time which destroyed the relevant known records. For subsequent wrecks, the Air Force retains accountability and control. Archeological surveys record wrecks as sites for cultural resource management purposes.

In conclusion, over the past decade the Air Force expended considerable sums to inventory and evaluate the surviving pieces of its aviation heritage. We now have a much clearer understanding of our significant properties and their preservation needs. Air Force cultural resource managers will discuss these needs in the context of a smaller, more fiscally constrained Air Force at a DoD cultural resources symposium during the 2000 Society for American Archaeology conference in Philadelphia, and at a special Air Force natural and cultural resources session at the Air Force Center for Environmental Excellence in the spring of 2000.

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The opinions and conclusions in this paper are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect those of Air Combat Command, the United States Air Force, or the federal government.